

RAND Research Brief

Intervening in Short-Warning Conflicts

The Role of a Rapidly Employable Joint Force

A key element of the Department of Defense's effort to "transform the force" is developing capabilities for rapidly employable joint task forces (JTFs). In many plausible military interventions along the ill-defined spectrum of small-scale to large-scale conflicts, long-range precision fires alone would not be sufficient, and the JTFs would need ground-maneuver forces employable within days of a decision to take action. A new RAND analysis suggests that a first, provisional version of such a capability could be achieved in the near to mid term by "zero basing" (i.e., rethinking from first principles the use of existing airlift and ship-based prepositioning). The RAND team recommends a three-component first-week ground force of Army and Marine Corps units that would incorporate modern doctrinal concepts emphasizing agility, dispersal, networking, and precision fires. Although JTF details would vary, the concept calls generically for an Early Allied-Support Force, a Light Mobile-Infantry Force, and a Light (or Medium-Weight) Mechanized Force. All of these components could be employed within about the first week if sea-based prepositioning ships were already in the region. Constructing such provisional capabilities would not only address current military challenges, it would also move advanced doctrinal concepts into the mainstream of organizational practice and provide an experience base for subsequent insertions of technology and modifications of doctrine.

The RAND analysis integrates work accomplished for recent Defense Science Board summer studies, a 1999 study for the Department of Defense on force transformation, and several other efforts for DoD and Army spon-

sors. It also reflects much relevant experience of the Marine Corps. The remainder of this brief elaborates on the team's conclusions.

THE PROPOSED FORCE

The RAND team envisions an intervention strategy characterized by such early joint operations as connecting with allies, establishing theaterwide defenses, conducting strategic bombing, and reinforcing allied ground forces with units capable of early operations. Early deploying forces would fall into three components, the first two of which would be deployable within days by airlift and forward-deployed amphibious lift and the last of which would be deployed primarily using sea-based prepositioning ships (and airlift for most of the personnel). The components envisioned are as follows:

- An Early Allied-Support Force with a few hundred personnel who could link allied forces to U.S. command and control, information systems, and long-range fires. This force may need to bring with it significant amounts of equipment for reconnaissance, surveillance, and communications.
- A Light Mobile-Infantry Force with 3,000–5,000 personnel organized into two principal types of units: 500-person units with multiple missions, such as defending critical facilities and launching missile attacks, and 50-to-80-person units operating forward (in some cases behind enemy lines) to direct long-range fires and conduct ambush operations.
- A Light (or Medium-Weight) Mechanized Force with 3,000–5,000 personnel in five or six agile tactical units

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capable, for example, of antiarmor missions against enemy forces already weakened by long-range fires and ambushes. It would have some of its own long-range missiles, plus shorter-range indirect fires, line-of-sight weapons, and attack helicopters. As necessary, it could also include some heavier armor.

Substantial additional forces would reinforce as soon as feasible, but the focus of attention in this analysis was on the three-component early-employment force, which could be used in the first week.

It is noteworthy that the force proposed includes *mobile* light elements (no "straight-leg infantry"), medium-weight elements such as wheeled or tracked armored vehicles, and even—as necessary—some heavy tanks. Such a force would *not* require heroic technological advances in light attack vehicles and superfast sealift. Much could be accomplished within the next five years with doctrinal changes and systems already available or in advanced development but not adequately programmed. RAND argues for advancing the priority of such programs as operator-in-the-loop indirect-fire systems and loitering, short-time-of-flight systems. In the longer run, achieving the full potential of the operational concept will require doctrinal and technological advances well beyond those now in hand. On the technology front, advances are especially needed in the following areas: protection and armament, situational awareness, command and control, intratheater lift, and vehicles for both transportation and fighting.

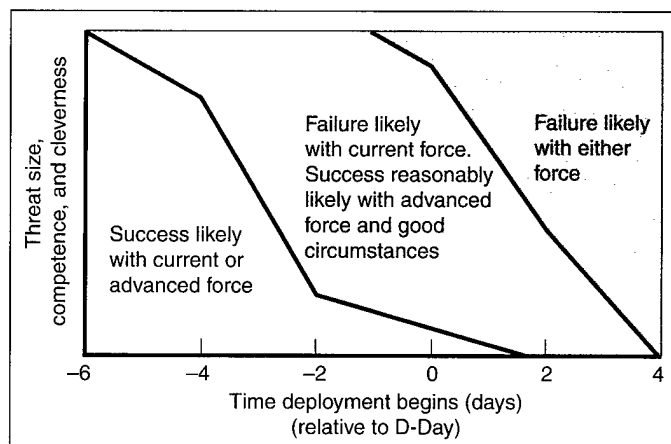
The RAND concept calls for elements of the proposed force to be prepositioned on ships for rapid employment. Rather than procuring new mobility systems, the Department of Defense and services should rethink how to use current and programmed Marine Corps Maritime Prepositioned Force Squadrons and Army Afloat Prepositioning Sets. The objective would be aggressive, immediate, and often dispersed employment of the proposed force with new doctrine suitable for modern circumstances, rather than more classical and deliberate operations with older doctrine. An important proviso here is that the Department of Defense should consider more routinely moving and readying prepositioning ships upon strategic warning (and perhaps maintaining such ships on station for lengthy periods)—as carrier battle groups have for decades. This is largely a high-policy issue.

WHAT MIGHT BE ACCOMPLISHED

By integrating a rapidly employable ground force into a joint task force that includes long-range precision fires

from air and naval systems, a great deal could be accomplished that could not typically be accomplished with the use of long-range fires alone. For example, long-range fires alone might deter or thwart a mechanized invasion that must cross open terrain and maneuver long distances while the United States controls the air. However, their utility in other kinds of crises (e.g., against ethnic cleansing) is limited. Even in the case of a clear-cut invasion, their effectiveness may be drastically reduced, as discussed analytically in the study, if the enemy disperses his forces or if tree cover is available to hide their movements. Having a force on the ground could help in directing long-range fires in such situations and add substantial additional killing power with short-range indirect-fire systems organic to the ground force. Conversely, relatively light ground forces could not survive unaided in the face of a heavy armored attack; support from long-range fires would be essential to the survival and thus the effectiveness of such forces.

With that kind of fire support, even relatively small maneuver forces could materially affect an invader's tactics, forcing greater concentration and more deliberate movements. In some cases, a rapidly employable ground force could be particularly effective if inserted behind enemy lines, where it might ambush forward combat units and combat-service-support vehicles, moving quickly from one engagement opportunity to the next. Such a force's distributed operational and tactical mobility could allow a high level of survivability and lethality—*assuming U.S. information dominance, which would be essential to the force's survival*. That is, timely target locations would have to be provided to the force, good insertion locations and entry and exit routes would have to be identified in advance, and the enemy's surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities would need to be severely suppressed. Despite rhetoric to the contrary, achieving this informa-



The Need for and Value of Rapid Reaction Forces

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tion dominance will be a major challenge for the future. It is part of Joint Vision 2010, but not something to be merely assumed, even in 2010.

The potential effect of a rapidly employable joint force on the outcome of a mechanized invasion is shown in the figure. Although the figure is generic or notional in appearance, it is based on considerable analysis and simulation. The graph maps the potential of the threat against the time at which U.S. forces begin deploying into the theater, relative to the start of the enemy invasion (D-Day). As designated by the white area, current forces would be successful at defeating a wide range of enemy threats only if deployment begins well ahead of the enemy campaign or forces are already in place. Typical planning scenarios often assume that kind of warning and timeliness of decision, but such assumptions are very questionable. Also, although the United States has forward-deployed forces in some areas currently, that will not always be the case—in part because host countries may not want them and in part because the United States cannot afford to be forward deployed everywhere.

With the envisioned rapidly employable joint task force, the region of potential success would be extended to include the light gray area in the graph. In favorable circumstances (discussed more fully in the study), and assuming reinforcement, a range of threats could be defeated even if the force did not begin overt deployment

until the enemy began his invasion. However, even a force as small as that proposed could not be deployed rapidly enough without the existence and use of strategic warning. This is why the RAND team recommends that ships carrying prepositioned equipment for the task force be stationed in potential crisis theaters or be directed to move to those theaters as crises develop. There is recent precedent for this in the Persian Gulf.

STIMULATING FORCE TRANSFORMATION

It is worth reemphasizing that the proposed joint task force would not depend on hypothetical quantum leaps in force lightening or strategic mobility—nor would it require massive new procurements. It would instead encourage the doctrinal changes needed to deal with emerging challenges and to exploit technology that is either available or within reach. At the same time, experience with the envisioned force would form a superb basis for experimentation that would help define subsequent generations of equipment and doctrine. Indeed, one of the principal advantages of establishing the proposed force would be to bring the concepts associated with it into the operational military (instead of leaving them in the research-and-development realm for a number of years). This would inspire and channel the activities of ambitious, innovative commanders eager to effect improvements on their own tours of duty.

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